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R 080711Z MAR 06  
FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5365  
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1046  
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC  
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC  
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HONG KONG 000957

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/ANP AND INR/EAP, EAP/EX, EAP/BCLTV, EAP/EP  
TWANG, EAP/CM KBENNETT, GWARD  
STATE FOR G VTUREKIAN  
STATE FOR M/MED AND M/MEDEX PETER WOOD  
STATE FOR OES ANTHONY ROCK, OES/STC MGOLDBERG, OES/IRA  
DSINGER AND RDALEY  
HHS FOR OGRA -STEIGER, ELVANDER, BHAT BANGKOK FOR RMO, CDC  
USDA FOR DU/US --LAMBERT  
BEIJING FOR DSELIGSOHN, CSHAPIRO

E.O. 12958: NA

TAGS: [ECON](#) [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [AMED](#) [KFLU](#) [HK](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: HONG KONG REACTIONS TO GUANGZHOU CASE

REFS: A) Guangzhou 6174 B) Guangzhou 6175

11. (SBU) Summary: On March 3, 2006 the Health Department of Guangdong Province informed the Hong Kong Department of Health (DOH) of a suspected human case of H5N1 avian influenza (AI). After the case was confirmed by Guangdong Provincial authorities as a definite H5N1 case (see reftels) on March 5, the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) announced that imports of live poultry, day-old chicks, and pet birds from the Guangdong Province would be banned for three weeks to provide sufficient time for Guangdong and Hong Kong health officials to conduct a comprehensive epidemiological investigation. The Centre for Health Protection sent three medical officials to Guangzhou to take part in the investigation. AI expert Guan Yi said that the situation raised serious questions about the effectiveness of mainland Chinese poultry vaccines but praised both Guangzhou's improved transparency as well as the Hong Kong Government's (HKG) cautious responses thus far. Democratic Party legislator Fred Li, on the other hand, expressed serious concern about the delay between the AI victim's hospitalization on February 22 and Guangdong's notification of the case to the HKG on March 3. End Summary.

New Human AI Case in Guangzhou  
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12. (SBU) On March 3, the Guangdong Province Health Department informed the Hong Kong DOH about the suspected H5N1 related death of a Guangzhou man on March 2 (see reftels). After Guangdong Provincial authorities confirmed on March 5 that the man's death was indeed caused by the H5N1 virus, the HKG announced that imports of live poultry, day-old chicks, and pet birds from the Guangdong Province would be banned for three weeks to provide sufficient time for Guangdong and Hong Kong health officials to conduct a comprehensive epidemiological investigation. On March 7, the AFCD announced that the HKG would limit the number of new poultry licenses so that the poultry population in Hong Kong is kept under two million chickens at any time. Furthermore, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Department (AFCD) announced that they would enhance AI surveillance and check other bio-safety measures at all poultry-related locations in Hong Kong. According to media reports, the price of freshly slaughtered chickens has already risen 60% since the announcement of the ban. If the suspension continues over 3 weeks, local supplies of live chickens will then be also affected due to the inability of Hong Kong poultry farms to restock with day-old chicks.

13. (SBU) Although the HKG did not institute any border restrictions or require travelers to fill out a health declaration, Hong Kong immigration officials stepped up public awareness efforts at all immigration control points by distributing flyers and putting up more AI awareness posters. DOH Director P.Y. Lam stated that stricter immigration controls were not necessary until the confirmation of human-to-human transmission of the H5N1 virus. CHP spokesperson Thomas Tsang told Econoff that the CHP had sent three senior medical officers to Guangzhou to conduct an epidemiological investigation there: Principal Medical and Health Officer Dr Chuang Shuk-kwan, Head of Public Health Laboratory Services Branch Dr Wilina Lim, and Senior Medical and Health Officer Dr Edwin Tsui. All three officers have been involved in previous epidemiological investigations in mainland China, most notably during the 2005 streptococcus suis outbreak in Sichuan. On March 7, Dr. Chuang said that she believed the AI victim had most likely been infected from live poultry stalls in a Guangzhou wet market.

#### AI Expert Guan Yi Speaks

14. (SBU) Hong Kong University (HKU) researcher Guan Yi said  
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that he was not surprised that a human infection had originated in Guangzhou, pointing out that HKU research had shown the presence of H5N1 in many mainland provinces where it has not been reported recently. He said that while the situation was certainly more dangerous than before, he still believed that this was an isolated case. Guan said that as far as he knew, the girlfriend of the infected man had only shown normal flu-like symptoms, not the more severe symptoms associated with H5N1 infection. As for the source of the infection, he said that in line with the results of the recent HKU study he would not be surprised if one percent of the chickens in Guangzhou wet markets were actually non-symptomatic carriers of the H5N1 virus. This would mean that the poultry vaccines being used by mainland Chinese officials were ineffective and possibly hiding the further spread of the virus. Guan admitted, though, that he had no hard data to support this theory and had no samples of the various AI vaccines being used by mainland officials.

15. (SBU) Despite his doubts about the mainland Chinese poultry vaccines, Guan said that the Guangdong Government had evidently "learned how to behave" (xue guaile) since the SARS epidemic. He said that the seemingly long delay between the hospitalization of the infected man and the official notification to the HKG about the case merely reflected Guangzhou's limitations in both surveillance and analysis capabilities. Guan agreed with the HKG's approach towards the situation, saying that there was no need to stir up a panic in Hong Kong and cause unnecessary troubles by imposing travel restrictions. He said that HKG officials had done a good job in walking the fine line between taking prudent precautions and overreacting to the situation.

#### Legco Reactions

16. (SBU) Democratic Party Legislator Fred Li, on the other hand, said that many Legco members were "extremely concerned" about the delay between the man's hospitalization and the notification to the HKG about the case. Li said

that Guangzhou should be notifying the HKG at the preliminary test result stage as opposed to waiting for a final result, at which point it may be too late to take precautionary measures. Even if they catch the index case, he continued, they could always miss secondary cases if the H5N1 virus were to mutate into an efficiently transmitted human-to-human disease. Li claimed that the three week ban on poultry had been his idea to "buy time" for a full epidemiological investigation into the circumstances surrounding this case. If there are no chickens in Guangzhou with H5N1, asked Li, how in the world did this poor man become infected with the virus?

Cunningham